

**COUNTY OF SAN DIEGO, CALIFORNIA**  
**BOARD OF SUPERVISORS POLICY**

**Subject**

Undergrounding of Utilities - Waiver Requests

**Policy  
Number**

I-92

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**Purpose**

This policy provides criteria for reviewing and approving waivers of the code requirement to underground existing and new utilities for new subdivisions and centerline projects as authorized by Sections 81.306, 81.313, 81.614, and 51.511.2 of the San Diego County Code of Regulatory Ordinances.

**Background**

The purpose of undergrounding is to improve the appearance of communities by removing unsightly overhead wires and poles and to increase reliability of service by placing these lines underground where they are less subject to incurring damage. Sections 81.403(a)(6), 81.706(b)(3), and 51.511.2 of the County Code of Regulatory Ordinances require undergrounding of new and existing utility distribution facilities, including cable television lines, within the boundary or abutting half street of any new subdivision or centerline project. The developer is responsible for complying with these requirements.

This requirement to underground utilities may be completely or partially waived only when it is deemed that undergrounding would be impossible or impractical. This policy is intended to provide guidelines for reviewing such waiver requests.

**Definitions**

1. Immediate Area - In "urban" areas, the area within 1/4 mile of the project. In "rural" areas, the area within 1/2 mile of the project or as designated in the local community plan.
2. Rural - The Estate designation of the San Diego County General Plan Land Use Element or less intensive land use.
3. Urban - Any land use designation other than Rural.
4. Utilities - San Diego Gas and Electric, Pacific Bell, and cable television/communication companies.
5. Section - Refers to a section of the San Diego County Code of Regulatory Ordinances.
6. Centerline Project - Refers to a development project that is subject to the Centerline Ordinance (Sections 51.501 - 51.514).
7. Subdivision - Refers to both major and minor subdivisions.

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**Policy**

It is the policy of the Board of Supervisors that:

1. All new subdivisions and centerline projects must comply with the requirement to underground utilities set forth in Section 81.403(a)(6), 81.706(b)(3), and 51.511.2 unless waived or modified as authorized by Sections 81.306, 81.313, 81.614 and 51.511.2. Staff shall review all requests to waive this requirement using the criteria in this Policy.
2. Undergrounding may be waived if any of the following criteria are met:
  - a. All other properties in the immediate area are completely "built out" to planned densities and uses and the established utility system for that area is overhead, OR
  - b. Undergrounding would result in no reduction in the number of poles on or adjacent to the project, OR
  - c. The cost of undergrounding is prohibitively high based on utility company estimates.
3. The installation of underground utilities or the conversion of overhead utilities to underground will not be waived in the following cases:
  - a. When the subdivision is within or adjacent to an existing or proposed underground district.
  - b. When properties in the immediate area are not substantially "built out" to planned densities and uses in the area.
4. Each request for a waiver shall be considered on its own merit and shall be evaluated on site-specific circumstances.
5. Prior to granting a waiver of undergrounding, any request shall be sent to the local planning/sponsor group for review and recommendation.

**Applicability**

This policy shall apply to the following:

1. All subdivision applications that have not received final conditional approval.
2. All resolution amendments requesting a waiver of undergrounding.

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3. All recorded maps where the improvements have been secured but not constructed, and where a waiver is sought under the procedure provided in Sections 81.513 and 81.809.
4. All centerline projects that have not received final conditional approval.

**Authority**

The Director of Planning and Land Use, the Director of Public Works, or the appropriate decision making body (as applicable) may grant or deny all waiver requests pursuant to this policy in accordance with County Code Sections 81.306, 81.313, 81.614 and 51.511.2.

**Sunset Review**

This policy will be reviewed for continuance by 12-31-10.

**Board Action**

3-10-82 (10)

12-15-82 (48), operative 3-1-83

12-11-84 (10)

10-17-89 (54)

5-15-96 (5)

4-24-2002 (5)

06-23-04 (12)

**CAO Reference**

1. Department of Planning and Land Use
2. Department of Public Works